



---

The Meanings of Occupational Prestige: Reconsideration of the NORC Scale

Author(s): Joseph R. Gusfield and Michael Schwartz

Source: *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Apr., 1963), pp. 265-271

Published by: American Sociological Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2090613>

Accessed: 27-11-2015 04:23 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Sage Publications, Inc. and American Sociological Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Sociological Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

## THE MEANINGS OF OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE: RECONSIDERATION OF THE NORC SCALE<sup>1</sup>

JOSEPH R. GUSFIELD  
*University of Illinois*

MICHAEL SCHWARTZ  
*Wayne State University*

Many studies have attempted to measure, describe or gauge the relative rankings of different occupations. Specialists in stratification have tried to find the various rungs of the occupational ladder in order to ascertain social mobility patterns. They have sought to understand the bases of occupational choice, exit, and self-respect. Of the many studies labelled "occupational prestige" or "occupational evaluation" the one conducted in 1947 by the National Opinion Research Center has remained the most influential. But what is being asserted when respondents rate occupations?

To answer this we will report on the relation between the ranks of 15 occupations on the NORC scale and the responses of the same respondents to a Semantic Differential form on which the same 15 occupations were used as concepts and were judged on 22 scales of meaning. A modified NORC scale and the Semantic Differential were administered to 337 college students. Of course our empirical results cannot be generalized; however, the study does raise some doubts about the ways in which prestige rating scales had been used in stratification theory.

### WHAT DO PRESTIGE SCALES SCALE?

Many of our difficulties with the NORC and other occupational prestige scales arose from our failure to understand what respondents did when they were asked to rank occupations. How did the operations performed in scales of the NORC type support or reject or relate to the problems of ranked systems posited in stratification theory? Several theories of stratification suggest that it is important to distinguish between a normative and a factual order. A description of the distribution of unequal amounts of power, respect and income according to social

position is a description of the factual order of stratification. The system of norms by which such differentiation is made legitimate or rejected constitutes the normative order of stratification, the judgment of the justice or injustice of it all. Thus Barber makes the distinction when he writes: "Shared values are one source of . . . differential evaluations. . . . Social stratification is the product of the interaction of social differentiation and social evaluation."<sup>2</sup> It is on this basis that one of the major uses of rating scales emerges to determine the relation between social rank and evaluations of occupations.

If we assume that the hierarchy of occupations is institutionalized on a normative basis, then not only will some positions get more than others but the hierarchy will be legitimate. There will be a high level of consensus about the moral validity of the distributive system. In the Durkheimian conception of society, institutions rest on a moral consensus. Again to quote Barber, who uses this view of society in understanding stratification, "Social differentiation and social evaluation must have a certain degree of congruence with each other."<sup>3</sup> Are the factual and the normative orders indeed congruent, and which of these form the subject matter of rating scales? We all recognize that no matter how random a sample of a society we question, they are seldom an adequate source of information about the factual order of distribution of tangible valued items. If we want to know the distribution of income in the United States we will get a more accurate picture from economic data than by asking people for their perceptions of the income distribution pattern. However, if we are interested in how people perceive the distribution pattern or in how they evaluate it—that is, apply moral norms to it—then the best of economic data are worthless for our purposes. As an item of distribution, "prestige" inherently has a normative character. Respect, honor, status and deference all have reference to the evaluation which others place on a position or on action. Consider Johnson's definition of "prestige": "The approval, respect, admiration or deference a person or group is able to command by virtue of his or its imputed qualities or

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Barber, *Social Stratification: A Comparative Analysis of Structure and Process*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1957, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>1</sup> Revised from a paper read at the Mid-West Sociological Association Meeting, 1962

performances."<sup>4</sup> These are characteristics (respect, admiration, etc.) whose existence can only be determined by what the members of the society think about a position.

Furthermore, if the concept of prestige is to be used in the study of stratification it must occur as a separate, analytical dimension. We must mean something other than the fact that people perceive some jobs as getting more than others. Our usage of a prestige component in reward and in job choice implies that there are elements in work satisfaction and in social differentiation which are not completely determined by income or power. These relate to the pride or respect to which a given occupation entitles its incumbent. "Prestige" must be something other than the perception that a given job has a "better shake" than some other or else the term is useless and should be dropped. One could redefine "prestige" to imply only the recognition of differential distribution. Being a lawyer could be thought to be a "better job" than being a filling station attendant because the respondent perceives that the former earns more money than the latter. This usage, however, departs widely from the common historical usage of sociologists when speaking about occupational prestige. Ratings scales, such as the NORC scale, can be focused upon at least four different dimensions of "occupational prestige." It is the major point of this paper (and the data that we will report) that rating scales have confounded these and have led to conclusions which assume that only one of the following dimensions has been used by the respondent.

1. The respondent's perception of social differentiation: Here the respondent is telling the investigator that some jobs are perceived as "better" than others, as he sees it. Lawyers get more than filling station attendants and the respondent recognizes this factual order of things.
2. The respondent's perception of others: This is the posture of the natural sociologist. Here the respondent reports on the system of his society. He tells us that whatever his own views or judgments, this is how jobs are ranked in his society. He displaces the professional sociologist. As we have already indicated, this may be the case with prestige as well as with other items of reward.

In both of the above cases the emphasis is on the perception of the factual order—this is how things happen here. It is by no means normative. It tells us little about his evaluation of jobs. The respondent may admit that doctors earn more money or command more prestige than do janitors but he need not evaluate this

as acceptable, good or just. Veblen certainly saw that lawyers, clergymen and businessmen occupied honorific positions in American life. His irony was a way of saying that he thought honor was unjustly bestowed on occupations not worthy of it.

3. The prestige dimension *per se*: Here we attempt to find out what relative amounts of honor or respect are bestowed by the respondent on occupations. The normative aspect of prestige attribution suggests that some jobs, though they bring money or power, are degrading; others dignifying. Here we would try to see if the respondent does indeed follow such a process with respect to specific occupations.
4. The attribution of justice: Here we look at the normative order in its clearest form. This would represent the evaluation the respondent has of the rightness of the factual order and his conception of the just system. It would tell us whether or not respondents think doctors and lawyers *should* get more than machinists and salesmen.

It is worth noting that Centers found that approximately 45 per cent of the urban working class and of both rural middle and working classes felt that doctors and lawyers made too much money. These occupations, which ranked very high in "occupational standing" were the highest in being judged as instances of over-enrichment.<sup>5</sup> The question asked on the NORC study confuses several dimensions of "prestige." Look at the exact question asked of respondents:

"For each job mentioned, please pick out the statement that best gives your own personal opinion of the general standing that such a job has. Excellent standing. . . ."

The question is ambiguous with respect to which of the four dimensions of prestige or evaluation is being used. Even asked "What do you think is the one main thing about such jobs that gives this standing" (asked as a general question, not in regard to each occupation) does not clear up the ambiguity of "general standing." In truth, the authors do not claim that they are studying prestige but rather job evaluation, and for purposes of predicting job choice the distinctions may well be unimportant. But for stratification the distinctions are crucial.

#### USE OF OCCUPATIONAL RATING SCALE

The NORC scale is used in many places where there is some need for "placing" jobs on a scale of differential respect; for example, to determine whether or not a respondent has undergone social mobility. It is also used in connection

<sup>4</sup> Harry M. Johnson, *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1960, p. 469.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Centers, *The Psychology of Social Classes: A Study of Class Consciousness*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949, p. 142.

with the analysis of the relation of value systems to structural characteristics. This latter usage is especially our concern here. The problem has gained acute notice in respect to studies of occupational prestige and industrialization and the conclusions derived from these. Let us look at the most influential of these, the study by Inkeles and Rossi. They compared the occupational ratings in six studies from six different industrialized countries (using the NORC study for the U.S.). Although some differences in the comparative rank of certain occupations were found, the results were similar. Professional and business personnel ranked well above manual laborers. The authors concluded that "There exists among the six nations a marked degree of agreement on the relative prestige of matched occupations."<sup>6</sup> When we look at the operative terms in the questionnaire directives we are left in real doubt as to whether we have learned the patterns of prestige conferral in those societies. The studies used the following directives for the subject matter they sought from the respondents:

U.S.A. (NORC Study): "general standing."  
 Japan: "general reputations they have with people, those which people think highly of . . . those not thought so well of."  
 Great Britain: "social standing."  
 New Zealand: "social standing."  
 USSR (emigrants): "very desirable—very undesirable."  
 Germany (original study did not specify its question form)

The authors use these findings to support a "structuralist" rather than a "cultural" interpretation. Industrial occupations have the same standing in each of the countries despite cultural differences between the nations. Barber uses the Inkeles-Rossi study as the primary empirical support for his perspective on stratification. It demonstrates, for him, the basis of a factual order of stratification in the value system of the society; it establishes the way in which functional needs are given moral support. In Barber's words, "functionally important roles are congruent with or partly determine a system of values."<sup>7</sup> On the basis of ambiguous findings, a complex theoretical conclusion has been shored up.

#### THE RELATION BETWEEN NORC SCALE RANKINGS AND SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL PATTERNS FOR FIFTEEN OCCUPATIONS

The above considerations set the stage for the study reported here. We wanted to find the

imagery of the occupations and their relation to the NORC ratings. Specifically, we wished to determine whether occupations with high NORC ranks also received high ranks on (a) an evaluation scale, or (b) on a factual-normative, i.e., descriptive, scale, or (c) on both scales or (d) on neither scale. The Semantic Differential<sup>8</sup> was selected as the most appropriate instrument, since it eliminates verbal fluency of the respondents as an intervening variable while it measures connotative meanings that respondents attribute to word concepts. In general, it is the connotative meanings attributed to occupations that remain uncontrolled. The Semantic Differential permits the measurement of that aspect of meaning. We wanted to know whether the meanings attributed to occupations of varying ranks are evaluative meanings in the "good-bad," "base-honorific" sense, or whether they are essentially factual-normative, reality-based, descriptive meanings. The Semantic Differential is composed of scales of polar-adjectives with seven points interposed between the adjectives, such as

Good: —: —: —: —: —: —: —: Bad

Respondents are asked to rate a word concept on each of these scales. Osgood has shown that different pairs of polarities are highly inter-correlated and that some of these pairs represent an evaluation dimension of meaning, other pairs, an activity dimension, and others a potency, or strength, dimension. We selected six items that have high factor loadings on the evaluation dimension from Osgood's thesaurus study: honest-dishonest, useful-useless, successful-unsuccessful, dirty-clean, sweet-sour, secure-insecure. From the remaining factors, we selected scales that are primarily reality-based descriptive ones. We have also constructed some new scale items for this purpose. These scales are: Middle class-Working class, Sober-Drunk, Democrat-Republican, Rural-Urban, Poor-Rich, Negro-White, Unemotional-Emotional, Young-Old, and Things oriented-People oriented. Finally, we selected some items that are rather ambiguous in that they have both evaluative and descriptive aspects. We refer to these as "mixed items." They are: Passive-Active, Religious-Irreligious, Masculine-Feminine, Foreign-American, Strong-Weak, Light-Heavy, and Tough-Tender.

The question with which we are concerned is the extent to which the rank of each mean scale value for each occupation is related to the rank of the occupation on the NORC scale, e.g., is the highest ranked occupation also highest on each of the 22 scales, on some of them

<sup>6</sup> Peter H. Rossi and Alex Inkeles, "National Comparisons of Occupational Prestige," *American Journal of Sociology*, 61 (January, 1956), pp. 329-339.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Charles E. Osgood, George J. Suci and Percy H. Tannenbaum, *The Measurement of Meaning*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957.



(and if so, which ones), or on none of them. If respondents rank occupations in terms of prestige in the evaluative sense, we would expect only the evaluative items to be related to the occupational ordering. On the other hand, if the respondents are in fact assuming the posture of the natural sociologist and are ordering occupations in terms of the way others see it or are describing the factual order of things, then we would expect the group of descriptive items to be highly related to the occupational ordering. Finally, respondents may indicate that both sets of items, as well as the mixed type, are related to the occupational orderings, in which case we may speculate that "prestige" or "general standing" may be determined by more than one component.

An occupational rating questionnaire was administered to 337 students in sociology and architecture classes. The questionnaire was identical to the one used in the NORC study, but it included 34 of the 90 occupations. Three weeks later a Semantic Differential was administered to the same groups, using 15 of the 34 occupations as concepts to be judged on the 22 seven-point scales. The composition of the group of respondents is unimportant for our purposes here, since our sole interest is in the consistency between rank order of the 15 occupations on the NORC scale and rank order on the 22 scales. The 15 occupations, in the order of their rank in the sample on the NORC scale, is as follows: Scientist, lawyer, mayor, civil engineer, banker, building contractor, school teacher, radio announcer, farm owner, store manager, policeman, traveling salesman, locomotive engineer, plumber, and machine operator.

As we can see from this order, the results were similar to those reported in 1947 by North and Hatt. Professionals and people in authority ranked higher than farmers, salesmen and manual laborers. Each of the 22 scales yielded a rank order for the 15 occupations which varied to some degree from the rankings on the administered NORC scale. For example, "manager of a store" ranked tenth among these 15 occupations in "general standing." It ranked eighth on the Dirty-Clean scale, third on the Passive-Active scale, and ninth on the Middle class-Working class scale. (Read left hand as the first rank. Thus, on the Passive-Active scale, the machine operator ranked first. This means he had the highest score for passivity of the 15 occupations. The entire rank order for each occupation and for each scale is reproduced in Table 1.) Spearman rank order coefficients were computed between the rank order on each scale and the rank order on the NORC modified scale.

Twelve of these were statistically significant at the .05 level or less. These were also the 12 with the highest correlations, ranging between .47 (Honest-Dishonest) to .93 (Middle class-Working class). The entire table of coefficients is reproduced in Table 2. Among these 12, six are from the factual-normative scales, five are evaluative scales and one is a mixed type. The high correlations of the Successful-Unsuccessful and Secure-Insecure evaluative scales on the one hand and the Middle class-Working class and Poor-Rich descriptive scales on the other hand, suggest circular reasoning may be at work. It is as if the respondent said, "In American society, lawyers, bankers and scientists are successful people and in the middle class. Therefore, they have a high general standing or *vice-versa*." This leads us to believe that the NORC scale did not reflect only a set of values applied to occupations but rather a set of perceptions about the social status which the occupations receive in the society (factual-normative) as well as a set of values. In short, they may reflect a justified factual-normative order of stratification. This interpretation is not unqualified. The moral designations do appear related to occupational rating. Honesty and usefulness are imputed to highly ranked occupations with more intensity than they are to the lower ranked occupations, although these scales showed only the tenth and eleventh highest correlations (.69 for Useful-Useless and .47 for Honest-Dishonest).

#### EVALUATION OF SPECIFIC OCCUPATIONS

Analysis of some specific occupations indicates the "mix" of different patterns tapped by the scaling instrument. Examining the scientist and the lawyer we can see some important differences between the occupations ranked first and second on our NORC scale. They both ranked among the top five in usefulness. The lawyer was identified as urban while the scientist was somewhere in the middle. Both were viewed as among the five least religious occupations, the scientist being the most irreligious. The scientist was clearly things-oriented and the lawyer clearly people-oriented. The scientist was seen as the least emotional and the lawyer as ninth least emotional. While both were among the five most secure (lawyer second and scientist fifth) the lawyer was viewed second richest (the banker was first) and the scientist as seventh. There is very little that we can designate as a common evaluative framework for these two occupations. The lawyer ranks fifth most useful while the scientist is seen as the most useful. The lawyer appears as a rich, powerful figure while the scientist is much less so but is highly useful.

TABLE 1. TOTAL SAMPLE SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL RANKS (LOW TO HIGH)

Occupation	NORC Rank	Semantic Differential Scales *																					So-Dr	In-Se
		D-C	P-A	Y-O	R-I	Usf	F-M	F-S	To-Te	So-Sw	W-S	S-Un	Un-EM	H-D	T-Pe	Mc-Wc	L-H	R-U	D-R	P-R	N-W			
Scientist	1	11	9	12	15	1	4	1	13	5	5	5	1	2	2	5	3	9	11	7	8	1	11	
Lawyer	2	14	15	8	11	5	8	14	8	10	8	2	9	6	14	1	6	14	14	14	13	6	14	
Mayor	3	12	12	14	3	10	9	15	9	11	7	3	12	14	13	3	8	15	8	13	15	4	10	
Civil engr.	4	7	14	4	10	3	11	8	7	6	10	4	3	5	1	4	9	6	13	12	7	9	13	
Banker	5	15	5	15	7	8	6	12	10	8	6	1	2	4	9	2	7	13	15	15	14	3	15	
Bldg. contr.	6	5	13	6	12	6	13	6	4	4	12	6	8	9	7	6	10	7	12	11	11	10	9	
School tchr.	7	13	7	5	2	2	1	10	15	15	1	8	15	1	15	8	1	3	7	9	4	2	12	
Radio anncr.	8	10	6	1	13	14	3	13	14	14	4	9	14	8	11	7	4	11	9	6	9	12	3	
Farm owner	9	4	11	10	1	4	14	7	3	9	15	7	10	3	5	11	14	1	5	10	6	5	8	
Mmgr. of store	10	8	3	9	8	13	2	4	12	12	3	10	11	11	8	9	5	10	10	5	10	8	5	
Policeman	11	6	8	3	5	7	10	9	2	1	13	11	4	13	12	12	13	12	4	1	2	7	6	
Trav. slsmn.	12	9	10	2	14	15	5	11	11	13	2	14	13	15	10	10	2	5	6	3	12	13	1	
Loco. eng.	13	2	4	13	4	11	15	5	1	7	14	13	3	7	6	14	15	2	2	8	3	11	7	
Plumber	14	3	2	11	9	9	12	3	6	2	11	12	6	10	3	13	11	4	3	2	5	14	4	
Mach. opr.	15	1	1	7	6	12	7	2	5	3	9	15	7	12	4	15	12	8	1	4	1	15	2	

\* The scale abbreviations and meanings are listed below:

D-C	= Dirty-Clean	To-Te	= Tough-Tender	Mc-Wc	= Middle Class-Working Class
P-A	= Passive-Active	So-Sw	= Sour-Sweet	L-H	= Light-Heavy
Y-O	= Young-Old	W-S	= Weak-Strong	R-U	= Rural-Urban
R-I	= Religious-Irreligious	S-Un	= Successful-Unsuccessful	D-R	= Democrat-Republican
Usf-Usl	= Useful-Useless	Un-Em	= Unemotional-Emotional	P-R	= Poor-Rich
F-M	= Feminine-Masculine	H-D	= Honest-Dishonest	N-W	= Negro-White
F-A	= Foreign-American	T-Pe	= Things Oriented-People-oriented	So-Dr	= Sober-Drunk
				In-Se	= Insecure-Secure

TABLE 2. SPEARMAN RANK ORDER COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL RANKS AND SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL RANKS

Scale No.	Description	Coefficient	Probability	Rank of Rho
1	D-C	-.74	.005	6
2	P-A	-.70	.005	8
3	Y-O	-.20	.10	19
4	R-I	-.23	.10	17.5
5	U <sub>sf</sub> -U <sub>sl</sub>	+.60	.01	10
6	F-M	+.19	.10	20
7	F-A	-.40	.10	14.5
8	To-Te	-.40	.10	14.5
9	So-Sw	-.23	.10	17.5
10	W-S	+.24	.10	16
11	S-Un	+.92	.0005	2
12	Un-Em	+.13	.10	22
13	H-D	+.47	.05	12
14	T-Pe	-.18	.10	20
15	Mc-Wc	+.93	.0005	1
16	L-H	+.41	.10	13
17	R-U	-.48	.05	11
18	D-R	-.83	.0005	3
19	P-R	-.74	.005	6
20	N-W	-.62	.01	9
21	So-Dr	+.74	.005	6
22	In-Se	-.80	.0005	4

*Twelve Scales Significant at .05 or Beyond*

Group I High  
±.93 to ±.70

Group II Moderate  
±.69 to ±.48

D-C (dirty-clean)  
P-A (passive-active)  
S-Un (successful-unsuccessful)  
Mc-Wc (middle-class-working-class)  
D-R (Democrat-Republican)  
P-R (poor-rich)

So-Dr (sober-drunk)  
In-Sec (insecure-secure)  
Use-Usl (useful-useless)  
H-D (honest-dishonest)  
R-U (rural-urban)  
N-W (Negro-white)

The fact that a high-ranking occupation can be comparatively disesteemed is certainly seen when we look at the banker as well as the lawyer. The lawyer is viewed as sixth most honest. The banker ranks fifth on the NORC rating but is only the eighth most useful. Similarly traveling salesmen and plumbers rank 12 and 14 respectively, but the salesman has the lowest score for honesty and usefulness while the plumber's rating for honesty and for usefulness are above his NORC rank (10 and 9). The difference between descriptive and evaluative patterns is perhaps best seen in the case of the public school teacher. Here there is the sharpest contrast between elements of esteem and status, on the one hand, and those of power and income on the other. The teacher ranks as the second most useful occupation, the weakest, the most honest. He ranks seventh on the scale of general standing, a ranking close to his position on scales reflecting distribution of power and income—eighth most middle class and sixth richest.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The recent work of Reiss, *et al.*,<sup>9</sup> and of Kreisberg<sup>10</sup> also indicates the tenuousness of using NORC and other occupational rating scales in use as evidence of prestige or of the value accorded occupations. Using published and unpublished data from the original NORC study, Reiss found that considerations of "prestige" were seldom called into play in choosing an occupation, although respondents did report lack of prestige as one significant variable in deciding they might leave an occupation in the near future. They concluded, as Kreisberg also did, that "it is not clear that a 'prestige' component is consciously perceived as

<sup>9</sup> Albert J. Reiss, Jr., Otis Dudley Duncan, Paul K. Hatt and Cecil C. North, *Occupations and Social Status*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Kriesberg, "The Bases of Occupational Prestige: The Case of Dentists," *American Sociological Review*, 27 (April, 1962), pp. 238-244.

a reward attached to occupations." Respondents reported a number of criteria almost equally used as the "one main thing about such jobs that gives this standing." (Our results suggest there is far from one main thing.) In common with other studies, lower economic strata were more likely to emphasize the factual order and used income and security. Higher strata were more likely to focus on self-expression and "prestige" in the Weberian sense of a separate dimension. Kreisberg's evidence bolsters our suggestion that respondents often act like natural sociologists. In keeping with our findings of a general set of terms used in ranking (Middle-Working class and Successful-Unsuccessful) Kreisberg found that the variable of prestige accorded professionals was the most significant variable in explaining rating of dentists. Other perceived characteristics of the occupation, such as degree of skill or the utility of dentists, were not as crucial as knowledge of a hierarchy in which professionals had a high rating. As Kreisberg wrote, "It may be that a person accords an occupation high prestige because he knows *as a matter of fact* that most persons accord members of that occupation high prestige."

Both these findings and ours suggest there is a distinct possibility that in the study of occupational prestige we are not getting only the system of evaluations which respondents may use in judging occupations. Either we obtain the descriptions of a factual order, in which the existent fact that A is a "better" job than B is recognized, or we may be confronted with a "pluralistic ignorance" in which each respondent assumes that the factual order is a reflection of the normative order which others, not himself, possesses. In either case the ratings emerge as descriptive rather than evaluative or ambiguously both. Kreisberg's suggestion that people learn prestige ratings apart from imputation of any qualities or moral judgments of specific occupations is in line with our reasoning. Our data lead us to conclude that future studies that require judgments of prestige be designed in a manner that will permit the investigator to designate the amount of variance explained by each of the component elements of the judgment.

But the point is more than peripheral and methodological. It cuts to the heart of a major issue in sociology. Recent criticisms of functional theory have pointed out the conflict between perspectives which emphasize the individuals' adaptation to facts of power in institutional arrangements. If we assume that description is evaluation, we unwittingly approve or condemn rather than analyze. We find congruence where none has been displayed.

## THE INDEX OF CLASS POSITION: AN IMPROVED INTERCOMMUNITY MEASURE OF STRATIFICATION \*

ROBERT A. ELLIS

*University of Oregon*

W. CLAYTON LANE

*San Jose State College*

AND

VIRGINIA OLESEN

*University of California, San Francisco Medical Center*

The Index of Class Position (ICP) described in this paper was developed to provide an easily applied intercommunity measure of stratification that would improve upon the accuracy of estimating an individual's position in the class structure. The need for such a measure arose from research being done in the college setting, which often makes existing stratification procedures impracticable.

That college undergraduates characteristically establish residence on campus, often at a considerable distance from their homes, precludes employing a number of standard procedures. Eliminated by this consideration are: (1) the prestige rating technique in its various forms,<sup>1</sup> (2) Warner's Index of Status Characteristics,<sup>2</sup> and (3) socio-economic status scales of the Chapin and Sewell prototype<sup>3</sup>—all of which

---

\* Revised version of a paper read at the annual meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, April, 1962. The research has been supported by grants from the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology, the Social Science Research Council, Stanford University Research Funds, and the National Institute of Mental Health (M-4968). Appreciation is expressed to Kenji Ima and John Koval for their assistance in analysis of the data. The authors are also indebted to Robert Dubin and William Robinson for their helpful suggestions in the revisions of the manuscript.

<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Ellis, "The Prestige Rating Technique in Community Stratification Research" in Richard N. Adams and Jack J. Preiss (eds.), *Human Organization Research*, Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1960. See also Milton M. Gordon, *Social Class in American Sociology*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1958, pp. 135-151; Leonard Reissman, *Class in American Society*, Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959, pp. 125-134.

<sup>2</sup> W. Lloyd Warner, Marcia Meeker, and Kenneth Eells, *Social Class in America*, Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1949, pp. 121-230.

<sup>3</sup> F. Stuart Chapin, "A Quantitative Scale for Rating the Home and Social Environment of Middle Class Families in an Urban Community," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 19 (February, 1928), pp. 99-111; *The Measurement of Social*